

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 9846

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SREF, TH
SUBJ: INDOCHINESE REFUGEES - RESETTLEMENT IN THAILAND

REF: A) STATE 091762; B) GENEVA 3158

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. REFTELS LEAD TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE ONLY VIABLE SOLUTION FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IS RESETTLEMENT IN THAILAND. HOWEVER, AS WE HAVE REPORTED, THE THAI ARE NOT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW KEY OFFICIALS, YET THINKING IN THESE TERMS. THE PROBLEM FOR THAILAND IS THORNY. WE WISH TO SUGGEST A POSSIBLE MECHANISM AS A SOLUTION. END SUMMARY.

2. TWO YEARS AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE NON-COMMUNIST STATES OF INDOCHINA, THAILAND RETAINS AN ENORMOUS AND COMPLEX RESIDUAL PROBLEM WITH A GROWING NUMBER OF REFUGEES SEEPING ACROSS ITS BORDERS AND INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE AND INTEREST ON THE WANE. WE WOULD LIKE TO REVIEW THE BIDDING.

3. THE UNITED STATES, FRANCE AND OTHER STATES THAT REACHED OUT, AND ABSORBED OVER 200,000 INDOCHINESE REFUGEES IN 1975 AND 1976, CAN TAKE A CERTAIN MEASURE
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OF PRIDE AT THE SWIFTNESS AND RELATIVE EFFICIENCY WITH WHICH THE REFUGEES WERE SELECTED, TRANSPORTED AND RESETTLED ABROAD. IN THE AMERICAN CASE, THE EASE OF ABSORPTION HAS, WE BELIEVE, SURPRISED EVEN THOSE WHO WERE MOST IN OPPOSITION AS WELL AS THOSE WHO HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE IN EARLIER REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMS.

4. THE THAI FOR THEIR PART, DESPITE EARLIER OPPOSITION AND AN ILL CONCEALED DESIRE TO FORCE THE REFUGEES TO DEPART, HAVE PERMITTED SOME 80,000 REFUGEES TO REMAIN. UNHCR REP BERTA HAS PRESSED THE RTG REPEATEDLY TO MAKE A BEGINNING ON RESETTLEMENT OF INDO-CHINA REFUGEES, USING THE INITIAL OBJECTIVE OF PROMOTING REFUGEE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AS A MEANS OF GETTING AT THIS OBJECTIVE. UNHCR HAS PERCEIVED ,AS HAVE WE, THAT SOME KEY THAI OFFICIALS HAVE RESPONDED FAVORABLY TO THE CONCEPT OF REFUGEE SELF-SUFFICIENCY. WE BELIEVE THAT, AS TIME GOES BY AND ALTERNATIVE REFUGES DISAPPEAR, THE THAI WILL ULTIMATELY COME TO ACCEPT RESETTLEMENT IN THIS COUNTRY.

5. ACCORDING TO OUR ESTIMATES, THE NUMBERS OF ESCAPEES WHO CONTINUE TO COME INTO THAILAND, INCLUDING LAO, KHMER AND VIETNAMESE BOAT CASES, ADD UP TO AN AVERAGE OF 2-3000 PER MONTH. OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO THE THAI ARE THE VIETNAMESE WHO NUMBER OVER 1,600 IN THE TWO LOCATIONS RESERVED FOR BOAT CASES AND SOME 1,500 IN A PERMANENT CAMP NEAR KORAT. THE LARGEST INFLUX OF REFUGEES ARE, OF COURSE, LOWLAND LAO AND HILL TRIBESMEN WHO CONTINUE TO CROSS THE MEKONG ON AN AVERAGE OF 50-100 A DAY AS ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND POLITICAL REPRESSION IN LAOS WORSENS.

6. AS THE CAMPS IN THAILAND GROW IN SIZE, FINANCIAL SUPPORT HAS, AS THE DEPARTMENT AND GENEVA NOTE, BECOME MORE PRECARIOUS. WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE UNHCR HAS CUT RICE RATIONS FOR CHILDREN BY 50 PERCENT (FROM 500 GRAMS

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TO 250 GRAMS PER DAY). IN MOST CAMPS, FRESH VEGETABLES SUFFICIENT FOR ONE MEAL ARE DISTRIBUTED ONLY SEVERAL TIMES A WEEK. SUFFICIENT PROTEIN (PORK, EGGS, FISH, SAUCES, ETC.) IS DISTRIBUTED ONLY ONCE DAILY. HOUSING FACILITIES AND WATER SUPPLIES RANGE FROM ADEQUATE TO POOR. WE HAVE SEEN SOME CUTBACK OF VOLAG MEDICAL SERVICES IN THE CAMPS.

7. SECURITY IN THE BORDER AREAS REMAINS TENSE, PARTICULARLY AT ARANYAPRATHET, NONG KHAI, LOEI AND NAM. ACTIVITIES OF LAO AND KHMER ANTI-COMMUNIST RESISTANCE GROUPS OPERATING OUT OF REFUGEE CAMPS CREATES SIMILAR BORDER TENSIONS. THE PRESENCE OF THE VIETNAMESE ALSO AWAKENS OLD ANIMOSITIES, AND REMINDS THE THAI THAT ALMOST 50,000 VIETNAMESE "REFUGEES" REMAIN IN COUNTRY FROM ANOTHER INFLUX THREE DECADES AGO. THERE HAVE BEEN RECENT ARRESTS OF ALLEGED VIETNAMESE LEADERS FROM THE POST WW-II COLONY OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES FROM TONKIN. SECURITY AT THE BOAT CAMPS HAS BEEN TIGHTENED CONSIDER-

ABLY.

8. THIS MUST BE ADDED TO THE FACT THAT THE CAMPS AND REFUGEE CONCENTRATIONS ARE LOCATED IN THE POOREST AND LEAST ENDOWED PARTS OF THAILAND WITH ONLY THE RELATIVE SPARSNESS OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS AND CONTINUING LOCAL POLITICAL TRANQUILITY KEEPING THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL LID ON.

9. DR. BERTA, THE UNHCR REP, INDICATES TO US THAT THE INCREASES IN NUMBERS OF REFUGEES POSE SIGNIFICANT AND IMMEDIATE DIFFICULTIES FOR UNHCR FUNDING. COUPLED WITH THE DEPARTMENT'S VIEW THAT CONGRESS IS BECOMING RESTIVE OVER THE EXCLUSIVE NATURE OF THE U.S. FINANCIAL BURDEN PLUS SIMILAR COMMENTS FROM GENEVA MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THE LINES ON THE GRAPH ARE GOING TO CROSS AND THE THAI WILL BE DRIVEN TO CONSIDER A CHOICE BETWEEN FORCED REPATRIATION OR SOME FORM OF RESETTLEMENT.
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10. RESETTLEMENT WITHIN THAILAND THEREFORE APPEARS AS THE ONLY LOGICAL SOLUTION IN THE FACE OF DIMINISHING SUPPORT FOR MAINTENANCE OF CAMPS AND THE DRYING UP OF THIRD COUNTRY RESETTLEMENT OPPORTUNITIES. WE THUS AGREE THAT A MULTILATERAL EFFORT SPEARHEADED BY THE UNHCR SHOULD BE LAUNCHED TO FIND WAYS TO MAKE RESETTLEMENT POLITICALLY PALATABLE TO THE THAI.

11. AS THE DEPARTMENT NOTES IN REFTTEL A, AGREEMENT SHOULD BE SOUGHT TO BEGIN PLANNING FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT WITH THE UNHCR IN THE LEAD. TO BRING FOCUS TO THE PROBLEM WE SHOULD ENCOURAGE AN EARLY VISIT TO BANGKOK BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER OR A SUITABLE HIGH LEVEL REPRESENTATIVE OF SADRUDDIN AGA KHAN, SUCH AS Z. RIZVI, WHO COULD DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THE UNHCR IN THAILAND IN CANDID TERMS AND EXAMINE THE RESETTLEMENT CONCEPT WITH THE THAI.

12. AS ONE INITIATIVE THAT MIGHT MERIT EXPLORATION, WE WOULD LIKE TO SUGGEST CREATION OF AN INTERNATIONALLY FUNDED THAI FOUNDATION TO MANAGE LAND HOLDINGS FOR INDOCHINESE REFUGEES. BECAUSE ONE OF THE MAJOR STICKING POINTS FOR THE THAI IS THE DISTRIBUTION OF LAND TO NON-THAI (NOT TO MENTION SECURITY QUESTIONS AND THE IMPACT OF WHAT WOULD APPEAR TO BE FAVORED TREATMENT OF REFUGEES OVER THE LOCAL POPULACE), IT IS POSSIBLE THAT SOME INSTRUMENT COULD BE FASHIONED THAT WOULD PERMIT THE NON-THAI TO WORK AND ACHIEVE SELF-SUFFICIENCY AND AT THE SAME TIME LIVE IN AN ENVIRONMENT

THAT WOULD OBVIATE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE PERILS TO THE
EIOLOGY SUCH AS THE PRACTICE OF "SLASH-AND-BURN" CULTI-
VATION PRACTICED BY THE HILL TRIBES. THE UNDERLYING
PREMISE WOULD ALWAYS BE THAT THE ARRANGEMENT WOULD BE
"TEMPORARY" AND LAST ONLY UNTIL CONDITIONS IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA
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IMPROVED TO PERMIT THE REFUGEES TO RETURN.

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ACTION DHA-02

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13. THERE IS PRECEDENT FOR SUCH A LAND RESETTLEMENT PROGRAM
IN THAILAND IN PROJECTS CARRIED OUT PRINCIPALLY BY THE
DEPT. OF PUBLIC WELFARE (PWD) OF THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR.
LARGE PUBLIC LAND HOLDINGS HAVE BEEN MADE AVAILABLE IN
THE PAST 35 YEARS TO LANDLESS THAI CITIZENS UNDER A PRO-
GRAM WHICH HAS ENJOYED A MEASURE OF SUCCESS.

14. THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE HAS BEEN THE AGENCY
OF THE RTG RESPONSIBILITY FOR SELF-KEEP LAND RESETTLEMENT.
THE LATEST SUCH SETTLEMENT, LOM DAM YAI, WAS ESTABLISHED
IN NORTHEAST THAILAND IN 1970. TOTAL AREAS VARY FROM
12,000 TO 165,000 ACRES. NUMBERS OF PEOPLE PER SETTLEMENT
VARY FROM 1300 TO 19,000. THE AVERAGE SIZE PER HOLDING
IS 6-10 ACRES. SIZES, WHILE VARYING FROM SETTLEMENT TO
SETTLEMENT, ARE NEVERTHELESS THE SAMEFOR ALL LAND HOLDERS
WITHIN THE SETTLEMENT. GENERAL FORMAT HAS BEEN TO ALLOT

TWO RAI (APPROX. ONE ACRE) PER HOME SITE WITH ALL HOMESITES GROUPED IN VILLAGES, CONSONANT WITH THAI (AND OTHER INDOCHINESE) TRADITIONS. FARMING PLOTS ARE WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE AND ALL SETTLEMENTS ARE SERVED BY ROADS AND AT LEAST ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL AND HEALTH FACILITY.

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15. GROSS INCOME PER FAMILY HAS AVERAGED \$120 TO \$650 034 63-4. BASIC CASH EARNERS HAVE BEEN CASSAVA, MAISE, KENF AND ATTLE.

16. SUCCESS OF THESE PROGRAMS HAS, OF COURSE, DEPENDED UPON PREVISION OF INTENSIVE AGRICULTURAL INPUTS SUCH AS TRAINING, EXTENSION SERVICES, FERTILIZER, IRRIGATION, SEED, CREDIT AND MARKETING MECHANISMS, ETC.

17. THE RTG THEREFORE HAS HAD ABUNDANT EXPERIENCE IN SUCH PROGRAMS. THE INITIAL QUESTION IS WHETHER THAILAND CAN BE PERSUADED (WITH EXTERNAL FINANCING) TO DO THE SAME FOR ITS UNWELCOME REFUGEE POPULATION WE THINK IT IS WORTH TRYING AND THAT THE TIME MAY BE PROPITIOUS.

18. MOI DEPUTY UNDERSECRETARY IN CHARGE OF REFUGEE MATTERS DAMRONG SUNTHONSARATHUN HAS INFORMED US THAT HE PLANS TO BE IN THE US AT THE END OF MAY FOR TWO WEEKS, TRAVELING TO LOS ANGELES, NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON. WE HAVE OFFERED TO REQUEST APPOINTMENTS FOR HIM IN WASHINGTON TO DISCUSS MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST. HE HAS ACCEPTED AND WE SHALL TRANSMIT HIS ITINERARY AND NAMES OF HIS PARTY AS SOON AS THEY ARE MADE AVAILABLE. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, THIS U.S. EDUCATED OFFICIAL (DUKE UNIVERSITY) IS EMINENTLY SENSIBLE AND PERCEPTIVE AND IS THE OBVIOUS OFFICIAL WITH WHOM TO BEGIN A DISCUSSION OF THE IDEA OF PROMOTING REFUGEE SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

19. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT WE SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DAMRONG'S PRESENCE IN THEUS TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM IN GENERAL TERMS WITH HIM IN WASHINGTON. (WE DO NOT RPT NOT BELIEVE IT
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ADVISABLE TO RAISE WITH HIM THE SPECIFIC PROPOSAL SET FORTH ABOVE, HOWEVER. THAT SHOULD BE LEFT FOR DISCUSSION HERE PREFERABLY AS AN UNHCR INITIATIVE.) WE ALSO SUGGEST THAT SOME EFFORT BE EXTENDED TO SHOWING DAMRONG SOME OF THE INDOCHINESE RESETTLEMENT SUCCESS STORIES PERHAPS IN THE LA AREA, IN ORDER TO INDICATE WHAT IS POSSIBLE. IF THERE ARE PARTICULAR RESETTLEMENT CASES IN AGRICULTURAL AREAS THAT ARE NOTABLE, SUCH AS THE THAI DAM OR MEO, THEN WE WOULD RECOMMEND THAT AN ESCORTED TOUR BE ARRANGED. SOME CAREFUL PLANNING COULD PAY IMPORTANT DIVIDENDS IN THIS AREA.

20. APPRECIATE ADDRESSEE COMMENTS ON THE POSSIBILITIES PRESENTED ABOVE.
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Message Attributes

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